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*The Obligation and Importance of searching
the Scriptures, as a Preservative from
POPEERY.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT
S A L T E R S - H A L L,
NOVEMBER 5, 1779.

To the SOCIETY, that support the LORD'S-DAY
Evening-Lecture at that Place;

And published at the request of the SOCIETY.

BY ABRAHAM REES, D. D.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED BY H. GOLDNEY,
FOR T. LONGMAN, T. CADELL, AND
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The Original and Authentic History
of the Society of Friends
in America
P. 177

SEYMOUR

PRESENTED AT
S. A. L. T. A. L. A.
NOVEMBER 1772



To the Society of Friends in America
Presented at their Yearly Meeting

And published at the request of the Society

BY ABRAHAM REES, D.D.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. BENTLEY,
FOR T. BODLEY, T. CASSELL, AND
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A S E R M O N, &c.

JOHN v. 39, former part.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES: *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*

THE external evidences of our blessed Lord's divine mission were prophecy and miracles; and they were both divine attestations to his supernatural character and appointment. The latter were obvious to the senses of those with whom he familiarly conversed; they were attended with a variety of circumstances, which left no room to question their reality; nor do we find, that the most captious and incredulous of his enemies ever disputed the facts; though they endeavoured to evade the force of them, as proofs of our Lord's divine origin and mission. The evidence of prophecy was contained in their own scriptures, in the sacred writings of the Old Testament, which the Jews professed to believe and to venerate: *These*, says our blessed Lord, *testify of me*; and thither he refers the obstinate and unbelieving for full conviction of his descent from heaven,

and supernatural designation to the office of their Instructor and Saviour.

With this view he charges upon them the admonition of the text, "*search the scriptures,*" not doubting, if they examined without prejudice the antient prophecies which they contained, and the character of the Messiah which they described, but they would find, that these were exactly verified in himself. Nevertheless, the exhortation, though originally addressed to the Jews, was designed to be more generally applied, and to comprehend all in succeeding ages, who were intrusted with the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament. The precept is positive and express; it is founded in reasons that are peculiar to no nation or age; and, therefore, the obligation of it is universal and perpetual. The meaning of this command is sufficiently plain and obvious; and the authority that enjoins it claims the utmost deference and submission. By *searching the scriptures* we are evidently to understand the frequent and attentive perusal of them; with a view of being instructed by them in the doctrines which they require us to believe, with a resolution of observing the precepts they inculcate, and a desire of
securing

securing the blessings they offer : and, as this command was indiscriminately addressed to all, who attended our Lord's public instruction ; and his auditory was composed of persons of every rank and station ; it was natural to understand it as equally obligatory on all : and, indeed, if it had not been intended as an universal and invariable rule of conduct, it would have been expressed with some limitation or exception : had the scribes and priests, who were the ministers of religion, and the expounders of the law in the Jewish church, been principally or solely concerned in it, some restriction was absolutely necessary, in order to prevent its being understood and misapplied : more especially, as it was likely to be interpreted in the same unqualified latitude by the proselytes to Christianity, and by those who were afterwards to enjoy a complete revelation of the divine will, as it is now contained in the Old and New Testament. If the sacred scriptures were not designed for general instruction and use ; if the perusal of them was to be prohibited under very severe penalties ; if none were capable of understanding them without an infallible interpreter ; if, on this account, they were to be preserved in an unknown tongue, and all translations

tions of them into a language, which the people in general might understand, were unlawful and dangerous ; the exhortation of the text must be not only nugatory and useless, but deceitful and ensnaring. However we know, there is a church, which calls itself Christian, and which claims a lineal succession from those founded by the apostles, that maintains this absurd opinion and practice in direct opposition to the declaration of the text : a church, in which it is expressly asserted, that the authority of the Pope is above the scriptures ; that no book or chapter would be canonical independently of his authority, and that the free use of the scriptures in the vulgar tongue would be dangerous and detrimental. Accordingly, the 4th rule of the Expurgatory Index, established by the council of Trent, and authorized by Pope Pius IV. * in the year 1564, expressly declares, that, " since it is manifest by experience, that if the holy bible be indiscriminately permitted in the vulgar tongue, greater damage than benefit

* See his Creed, formed on the decrees of this council, and concluding with threats of the indignation of God and of his blessed apostles Peter and Paul, against all that shall infringe or oppose it; in Hardouin's *Acta Conciliorum*, &c. tom. x. p. 199, &c.

would

would attend it, on account of the rashness of men; the judgment of the bishop or inquisitor should be decisive in this matter: and they, with the advice of the parish priest or confessor, may grant the perusal of the bible in the vulgar tongue, translated by catholic authors, to such persons as they shall understand to be incapable of receiving any injury from it, but the increase of faith and piety: and a licence or faculty in writing is to be given them for this purpose: but he, who, without such licence, shall presume to read the bible, or have it in his possession, may not receive absolution of his sins, unless he first delivers up his bible to the ordinary." And it is farther enacted by the same rule, that booksellers, who sell bibles in the vulgar tongue, without licence, or in any other way allow the use of them, shall forfeit the price of the books, and be liable to other penalties at the bishop's pleasure, according to the offence.* Pope Clement VIII. made an addition to this rule, on occasion of a new impression of the Bible, in which he declares, that, by the command of the holy, Roman and universal inquisition, the faculty of granting licences for

* Hard. Conc. Tom. x. p. 208.

reading or retaining the vulgar bibles, or any parts of the holy scriptures, as well of the New as the Old Testament, in any vulgar tongue, hath been taken from the *bi*shops or inquisitors; and by which he ordains, that this rule shall be inviolably observed. The decree of the fourth session of the Council of Trent, which declares the vulgate or Latin edition of the Bible to be the only authentic one, and which forbids, under penalties, any interpretation of scripture contrary to the sense, which the holy mother church, whose sole province it is to judge of the sense, hath held, and doth hold, really amounts to a prohibition of all bibles in the vulgar tongue. * Such precautions are absolutely necessary to the existence of this antichristian church, and, in this view, they are indications of a very sound policy: because nothing is more dangerous and detrimental to the usurpation of this church than the unrestrained perusal of the sacred scriptures. The long triumphs of the absurd and unscriptural superstitions of popery were principally owing to that deluge of ignorance and barbarity which overspread the greatest part of Europe dur-

* Hard. Conc. tom. x. p. 23.

ing the decline, and after the total destruction of the Roman empire; and a reformation in religion took place, with the revival of learning, and of that spirit of liberal inquiry, which is always friendly to the interest and influence of every kind of truth, whether speculative or religious. When men began to read the scriptures for themselves, they soon found, that they had been wrested from them by an unjust and incompetent authority; and that it was both their privilege and duty to acquaint themselves with those oracles of God, which are able to make them wise unto salvation.

It is my design, in the farther prosecution of this discourse, to state and evince the universal and invariable obligation of the precept in the text; or to shew, that the duty of *searching the scriptures* comprehends all the children of men, who are possessed of these means of instruction, without distinction and exception. We shall keep in view the occasion for which we are assembled; and apply the whole with a reference to those important events, which we are now called upon to commemorate. We may observe,

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I. That

I. That the holy scriptures teach and recommend truths and duties, which it is equally necessary for all to know and practise, in order to their acceptance and happiness. Men of every station and profession are alike concerned in the doctrines and precepts contained in the sacred writings. As all are intelligent and immortal, and capable of religion and happiness ; as all are in a state of apostacy and guilt, and stand in need of pardon ; as the promises of divine assistance are equally adapted to the circumstances of all mankind, degenerate and infirm, and exposed to temptation and danger ; as the favour of God is the supreme happiness of every reasonable and immortal being, and the sacred scriptures supply us with directions how to obtain it ; we have all an interest in the doctrines and precepts of divine revelation : We have an unalienable right of *searching the scriptures* for ourselves, in order to acquire that saving wisdom, which they furnish. As we have souls to be saved or lost, and the scriptures teach us what we must do to be saved, and what we must avoid, in order to escape threatened and apprehended misery ; none can deprive us of access to them ; none can restrain us in the free use of them, without
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the most flagrant injustice and cruelty. Religion is a personal concern ; the principles and practice of it must be cultivated by all, who would be happy either here or hereafter ; and the grace of God hath afforded us supernatural advantages for this purpose ; it is, therefore, our duty thankfully to accept and diligently to improve them. Those who would rob us of these advantages ; those who would bereave us of the means of information and assistance which God hath given us, are the avowed enemies of our welfare : They rob us of our most valuable property, of our choicest treasure ; they wrest from us the charter of our noblest and most inestimable privileges. If the Scriptures were merely a system of speculative truth, designed only to inform and amuse men of leisure and learning, there might be some pretence for appropriating the use of them to such persons, and preserving them in a language which was not generally understood : But since they contain discoveries and declarations, in which all are equally interested ; since they furnish a rule of faith and practice which is designed for universal observance, and are calculated for the instruction and happiness of men of every class and condi-

tion; they should be accommodated to the capacities; they should be intrusted to the free use of all, without partiality and exception. The views they give us of God and a Redeemer; the assistance they afford us for regulating our conduct in every relation and circumstance of life; the directions they supply for securing the favour of the Deity, an interest in the Saviour and the happiness of eternity, are necessary and acceptable to all; and, instead of restricting the use of them, they should be dispersed as much as possible; the perusal of them should be encouraged and promoted: And, instead of raising difficulties in the way of access to them, and rendering them obscure and unintelligible, they should be recommended and explained, that the truths they inculcate may be generally understood; and that they may answer the beneficial and saving purposes for which they are communicated to the world: More especially when we consider,

II. That the truths which they teach are of the highest importance, and the duties which they injoin of indispensable necessity and obligation. The Scriptures are designed not only for universal information and use; but they likewise contain information

mation of the greatest moment; they inculcate precepts, the observance of which is essential to our present and everlasting happiness. In a case of this kind, where our spiritual and immortal interests are concerned; on which every thing valuable to us for time and eternity depends; we cannot be satisfied with secondary information; we ought not to exercise an implicit trust in any man or number of men, who assume the direction of our faith and practice, and pretend to explain and interpret for us those oracles of God, which teach us the way of salvation. In matters of inferior moment, we might safely trust an uninspired instructor, without allowing him the privilege of infallibility; but in a case of such consequence as the salvation of the soul, where a mistake might prove irretrievably fatal; we should have free access to the word and to the testimony; and place unlimited confidence in no teacher or expounder of the divine will, whilst we have it in our power to appeal to the authority of God himself: And this is the more necessary, as the church of Rome, which enjoins us to shut our Bibles, and to put ourselves under her ghostly guidance, that is, to put out our eyes in compliment to our

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our leader, is, demonstratively, a very erroneous and insufficient guide. The church of Rome has been a thousand times convicted of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men; of perverting the most obvious truths of revelation; of relaxing the obligation of the most important precepts; and of encouraging men to hope for acceptance and salvation on terms, that are evidently unscriptural, and in the neglect and violation of some of the clearest and most indispensable duties of piety and morality.

In proof of this charge we might appeal to the decrees of her Councils*, to the bulls of her Popes, and the history of her discipline and conduct: We might appeal, as others have often done, to her confession and penance and purgatory; to her works of supererogation and merit; to her satisfactions and indulgences; and to the powers

* See particularly those of the council of Trent, held, by 25 successive sessions, from the year 1545 to 1564, which were solemnly ratified by the bull and creed of Pope Pius iv. and authoritatively enjoined, as a summary of the faith and discipline of the Romish church.

which

which she assumes of exercising absolution † without sufficient proof of real repentance; of stipulating pecuniary fines for the most atrocious crimes; and of canonizing men as saints in Heaven, and objects of worship, who were not fit to live on earth, who had been monsters of profligacy and cruelty; on no other ground, than wanton zeal for the support of her superstition, profuse donations or bequests, and impious pretensions to the power of working miracles for this purpose. Money, indeed, is of infinite use in the system of religious negotiation patronized by this church: The pardon of sin and salvation of souls are mercantile commodities in which her priests have largely trafficked: Her treasury has been enriched by issuing licences for committing any sort of sins, and by granting dispensations or absolutions for various crimes at settled prices: These are specified in a book of rates, called the *Tax-book of the Holy Apostolical Chancery*, first printed at Rome in the year 1514, and ascribed by some

† The absolution of the priest is to be considered not merely as a declaration of the pardon of sin, but as a judicial act, by which he pronounces sentence, under the character of a judge. Cap. 6. Sess. 14. Conc. Trid. apud Hard. Conc. Tom. x. p. 94.

writers to Pope Innocent viii. † Corporal discipline is allowed to make sufficient atonement for immoral practices, and a sum of money, properly bestowed, never fails to mitigate the torments of purgatory, to procure a speedy rescue from it and a distinguished place in her catalogue of worthies.

The conduct of the church of Rome, in these respects, and many more of a similar nature that might be mentioned, deserves

† There have been several editions of this book: From a correct edition printed by L. Banck, Professor at Norkopin in Gothland, in 1651, it appears that the price of absolution for fornication, attended with the most heinous circumstances, was 6 *grossi* or groats, i. e. about 2 shillings:

For a layman's murdering a			
layman,	—	—	5 gr. or 1s. 8d.
For laying violent hands on a			
priest, without shedding			
blood	—	—	9 gr. or 3s. 0
For committing incest	—		5 gr. or 1s. 8d.
The fee of absolution, and			
dispensation for a priest's			
keeping a concubine	—		7 gr. or 2s. 4d.
For forging the Pope's hand-			
writing	—	—	17 or 18 gr. or 5s. 8d. or 6s.

See the *Taxa S. Cancellariæ Apostolicæ*, à L. Banck: *Franequeræ*. 1651. p. 126, &c.

to be seriously lamented; as she leads her deluded votaries into the most dangerous and fatal errors; as she encourages false hopes of pardon and acceptance; and aims to reconcile the most notorious immoralities with the prospect of peculiar favour from the Supreme Judge, by outward observances, which produce no real change in the state and temper: As if counting beads and repeating *Ave Marias* in much greater proportion than *Pater-nosters* *, walking bare-foot, wearing coarse garments, lashing and lacerating the body, and other similar mortifications: As if pecuniary fines, long pilgrimages, votive offerings at the shrine of some pretended or even real saints, and large gifts or legacies to the church: As if these services, which are not at all incompatible with an unrenewed heart and unholy life, were pleasing to God and sufficient to

* The rosary, pretended to be formed by the inspiration of the Virgin Mary herself, and delivered to St. Dominic about the year 1220, consists of an hundred and fifty *Ave-Marias*, and only fifteen *Pater-Nosters*. St. Bernardine, a Popish writer, declares, "that men may say to their comfort, that upon the Virgin's account, God is more obliged to man, than they are to God." See the citation in the Sermons against Popery, preached at Salters Hall in 1735. Vol. ii. Ser. 1. p. 28.

convert monsters of lewdness and of cruelty, into acceptable penitents and illustrious saints. Good God! Is it possible that practices of this kind should form a part, a principal part, of the religion of creatures, whom thou hast endowed with reason, whom thou hast blessed with revelation? Is it for the support of such a system of doctrine and discipline, that the horrors of the inquisition have been established; that anathemas have been solemnly pronounced; and that countries, to which its malignant influence hath extended, have been occasionally drenched in blood? If we *search the scripture*, we shall find no traces of such practices, required or allowed, in any of its doctrines or precepts; nay, we shall find, that much more than these may be very consistent with a temper and character, which have no title to salvation; that, unless men unfeignedly repent they shall perish, notwithstanding any outward profession or observance; and that without holiness of heart and life no man can see God.

Far be it from me to suggest, that many who are avowedly the Members of the Church of Rome, do not retain the obligation of the more essential and important parts

parts of religion; that they have not distinguished themselves by an exemplary temper and conduct; and that they have not perceived, and even acknowledged, the absurd nature and pernicious tendency of the practices already recited, and still chargeable on the established system of Popery! It is my business to delineate the system of Popery, as it still exists in unrepealed statutes and unabolished forms, by way of caution and warning; and not to fix personal reproach on the character of individuals in this or any other church, how far soever its corruptions may extend, and in what degree soever it may need reformation. Farther,

III^{dly}. The Scripture is our only rule of faith and practice; and it is sufficient for this purpose without any supplements and traditions of human device and imposition. As it contains the only revelation derived immediately from God, and professes to teach us every thing necessary to regulate our creed or our conduct, in order to our Salvation, it must be sufficient for the end proposed. The contrary supposition would be a very reproachful and injurious reflection on the wisdom and goodness of its author.

Had the Deity designed to intrust any in later ages with powers to establish new articles of faith, or to enjoin other rules of conduct, not taught and recorded in his word, it is natural to imagine, that he would have given us some intimation of his design; that he would have raised our expectations of such secondary assistance; and described the character of the persons, who were to enjoy this distinguished privilege; otherwise we might be in danger of being deluded by following false guides, and submitting to those, who might pretend, without warrant, a divine commission and authority. We are, indeed, forewarned of such false guides; we are cautioned against their pretensions and usurpation, in characters which we can be at no loss to apply. *Let no man deceive you by any means; for the day of Christ shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God: whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness*

teousness in them that perish. * The papal power, thus described, hath exalted absurd and corrupt traditions † into an authority equal, and in many respects superior to that of divine commandments; and assumed the prerogative of interpreting scripture at pleasure; a power, which the Apostle justly represents as sitting in the temple of God, arrogating divine rights and divine honours. ‡ It is, however, the fundamental principle of Protestants, that the scriptures are of themselves, without any supplements or traditions, the sole; and that they are likewise a sufficient rule of faith and practice: and as long as we retain this principle, and

* II. Theſſalonians, ii. 3, 4, & 9, 10.

† The Apocryphal books and unwritten traditions, regularly transmitted and preserved in the Catholic Church, are enjoined to be received with the same reverence as the genuine scriptures, and an Anathema is pronounced against those who contemn them, by a decree of the 4th session of the council of Trent. Hard. Conc. tom. x. p. 22.

‡ Popes have been called, not only by their flatterers, but by their councils, *Most Holy Father*, *Most Holy Lord*, and declared to become actually saints at their election through the merits of St. Peter. See the privileges of the Pope and See of Rome enumerated by Gregory VII. in Baronius's Annales. ad Ann. 1076. Tom. xi. p. 507.

pursue

pursue it to its utmost extent, we shall be in no danger of reverting back to popery, nor of allowing and encouraging a papal spirit among protestants.

IVthly. The instructions and precepts of scripture are sufficiently plain and intelligible to all who read them without prejudice, and who are desirous of knowing the will of God, in order to the practice of it.

The Papists, on the contrary, pretend, that Christians, in general, are not capable of understanding the scriptures; and, therefore, that they must wholly depend on the judgment of others: nay more, that the scriptures are dangerous and prejudicial. Were this the case, there could be no such thing as a certain and invariable standard of faith and practice; but men's sentiments concerning it would be as various as their prejudices, connections and interests; and religion, as an excellent writer * observes, would be merely the several laws or customs of the countries, where they respectively prevailed. All truths that are essentially connected with our salvation are sufficiently

* Dr. Clarke. See his sermons, vol. 8, p. 169, 8vo.

obvious :

obvious; more abstruse and controvertible subjects are of proportionably less importance: and the mode of instruction which the inspired writers have adopted is, in this view, the most likely to enlighten, to convince and to persuade. They instruct us by history and parable; by an appeal to fact and experience; and by a variety of examples, which illustrate and enforce every precept they deliver. On this account, they are distinguished, not only for their clearness, but for their beauty and energy; and surpass in entertainment and efficacy, as much as in solid instruction, every other kind of writing.

Vthly. The sacred scriptures contain a rule of faith and practice enforced on our regard by the highest authority; and, therefore, they deserve a frequent and attentive perusal. They were indited by divine inspiration; the writers of them were under the immediate direction and influence of the holy spirit; and our blessed Lord, whose discourses are preserved in the New Testament, was the special messenger and representative of the invisible Deity. We may, then, be assured, that the scriptures contain all needful instruction; that their
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counsels are salutary ; that their commands are wise, just and good. With what humility and reverence, with what delight and trust, with what pious and upright resolutions should we always recur to these oracles of God ? When we consider, who addresses us in the sacred pages ; and for what end the scriptures were originally written, have been since preserved uncorrupted, and are transmitted down to us ; we cannot less than regard them with veneration and pleasure ; accept with affectionate gratitude this directory of faith and practice, this charter of inestimable blessings ; make the scriptures our counsellors and companions through life ; and study in the use of them to become wise unto salvation. Once more

Vithly. The scriptures acquire a still higher importance and value, because they contain the rule of our final judgment. Our acquittal or condemnation will depend on the conformity or disagreement of our character to the written word ; this will form the grand subject of inquiry at the last day, and serve to decide our everlasting state. God has now intrusted us with a declaration of his will and of the method of proceeding, when the account of life and time is closed
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and the unchangeable sentence is pronounced. He has previously informed us concerning the nature of the account which we must then render ; concerning the necessary qualifications, for obtaining the applause of our judge, and the grounds on which any shall then be disowned and rejected. Since, therefore, we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ; since we must all undergo his scrutiny and sentence ; a scrutiny which shall do justice to every character and a sentence which is decisive and final ; should we not acquaint ourselves with the nature of this solemn process ? should we not compare our prevailing temper and conduct with the rule of judgment, revealed in the holy scriptures ? And anticipate, by frequent meditation, the declared consequences of that sentence, which will then be pronounced ? From the judgment of men, who may dare to pronounce concerning our state and character, and, by an uncharitable sentence, exclude us from favour, we may appeal to this tribunal of justice and mercy ; if, upon carefully searching the scriptures and trying ourselves by this only infallible test, we find no ground of self-condemnation.

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This subject teaches us,
 In the 1st place, to what the introduction and prevalence of the absurd and tyrannical system of Popery has been chiefly owing: viz. to neglect and ignorance of the scriptures. Had these been properly regarded; had men maintained their right of *searching the scriptures* for themselves, and not tamely surrendered their judgment to the conduct and dominion of others, the absurd tenets and practices of the church of Rome could never have gained such an extensive spread, nor preserved their influence in the world for so many centuries. A period of the grossest ignorance was the most propitious to this system of mental slavery: Most of the corruptions of the church of Rome were introduced and propagated in the interval of profound darkness, which overspread Europe by the irruption of the Northern Barbarians in the fifth century, and which lasted for several ages. As soon as men had resolution to examine the scriptures for themselves, light and liberty were restored; the superstitions of Popery sunk into discredit, and the thunder of its ecclesiastical censures and excommunications was disregarded. The dawn of the reformation soon brightened into a glorious day, when the
 Bible

Bible was translated into the vulgar tongue, and, by the aid of printing, invented about the same period, dispersed among the people. And to this circumstance, the antient reformers, under Providence, were principally indebted for their success.

2dly. This subject enables us to discover in characters sufficiently obvious, the unjust usurpation and Antichristian spirit of the church of Rome.

Search the scriptures, says our Divine Teacher and Saviour; *these are they which testify of me:* To these he refers us for the rule of our conduct and the means of our salvation; on the testimony which they afford, and the evidence and influence with which they are accompanied, he rests the credit of his mission and the success of his undertaking. - So necessary, important and useful are the scriptures in this view, that he hath made it our indispensable duty to acquaint ourselves with the doctrines and discoveries they contain. But the church of Rome, in direct opposition to this express command, prohibits the use of the scriptures; represents the Bible as a very dangerous book; puts it out of the power of

her votaries to observe a positive and distinguishing precept of it; and thus establishes an authority in the Christian church, enforced by anathemas and numerous penalties, repugnant to that of its Divine Founder and Supreme Lord. There cannot be a more decisive proof of her Antichristian spirit than such practice; nor can we need any other evidence of her unwarrantable usurpation, than that which is furnished by contrasting her conduct in this respect with the declared will of our Divine Legislator, Redeemer and Judge.

3dly. How thankful should we be, that, in consequence of the reformation from Popery, and under the protection of a Protestant government, we enjoy the liberty of *searching the scriptures* and of forming our principles and practice, according to the instructions they afford. Were the power of papal Rome formidable and odious in no other point of view than this, that it deprives its votaries of free access to the sacred scriptures, we can never sufficiently admire and celebrate the goodness of divine providence, which has rescued us from it, and which has, once and again, seasonably interposed to prevent the re-establishment of
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of its tyranny in this country. It is needless to recite the numerous and wicked attempts of its emissaries for this purpose. This day revives the remembrance of our danger by the gun-powder-plot, in the reign of James I. and by the influence of Popish counsels on the government of his successors of the Stuart line; and it likewise revives the grateful, joyful remembrance of our escape. A power, that would rob us of the scripture; the most valuable deposit with which God has entrusted us; the rule of our conduct, the source of our choicest consolations, and our infallible guide to heaven and happiness, is justly formidable and odious. There is no evil, that may not be apprehended from the unrestrained triumph of such a power. When men's minds are enslaved by ignorance, error and superstition; when they surrender their spiritual rights to an usurped authority; they will make but a feeble resistance against other encroachments of a civil and worldly nature: Nay, if the freedom of the mind be sacrificed; if the conscience be enslaved; it is of little moment, what becomes of our persons or property; or what external privilege we retain or lose. A slight acquaintance with the history of our own country will

will inform us, that Popery has been always favourable to a system of arbitrary government; and that Popish principles with regard to religion have been generally adopted and encouraged by those who have pursued despotic measures in the state. Popery is, indeed, the only form of religion suited to the spirit and views of a tyrant. In proof of this, we need only appeal to the event, which we are now assembled to commemorate. King James II. was an undisguised and bigotted Papist; the principles of his education and the attachments of his youth directed every measure of his administration; he not only adopted the arbitrary system of his predecessors, but used every effort to change the established religion of his country; his short reign was marked with oppression and blood; the hearts of his subjects were alienated from him; and he deservedly lost his crown and kingdom. The views of the people, generally dissatisfied with the religion and government of James, were directed to WILLIAM Prince of Orange, who undertook the office and obtained the glorious appellation of our DELIVERER. Every step of his progress to an abdicated throne, was marked with evident traces of the counsel and concurrence
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of Divine Providence : And to WILLIAM and MARY, names ever dear to Britons and Protestants, and to Protestant Dissenters, and to the GLORIOUS REVOLUTION brought about by their means, we are indebted, under God, for the preservation of our laws, our liberty, our religion and our BIBLES. This was the memorable æra of the constitutional establishment of our civil rights, and of the legal toleration of Protestant Dissenters ; a toleration, which has been uniformly maintained, with little interruption, both in the letter and in the spirit of it, by the succeeding Princes of the Brunswick family ; and the benefits of which have, by an act of the last session of parliament, been rendered more comprehensive in their extent ; and the conditions of their attainment more conformable to the principles of Dissenters. By this gradual extension and improvement of our religious liberty, we are encouraged to hope that a time may come, when the toleration of Protestant Dissenters in this country will be as complete and perfect, as they have a right founded in Nature, and in their uniform attachment to the Protestant succession, and to the true interest of their country, to expect ; and as the most zealous advocates

advocates of an unrestricted toleration can desire.

4thly. Every attempt to embarrass and obstruct the exercise of private judgment in *searching the scriptures* is a species of Popery: It is altogether inconsistent with those noble principles on which the reformation was begun and completed, and by which it can be consistently justified. Those who protested against the errors of the church of Rome made their appeal to the scripture; they claimed the right of judging for themselves, what doctrines it taught, what mode of worship it enjoined, and what rules of conduct it inculcated. The principle was excellent and laudable: Let us adopt and maintain it in its utmost latitude; it may be urged with equal propriety against every kind and degree of imposition upon conscience. Error only dreads scrutiny and shelters itself behind restraint. The usurpation of the Popish church is justly held in abhorrence: Whilst we value our escape from this church, let us, to the utmost of our power, discountenance Protestant Popery. As we have the word of God in our hands, let us acquaint ourselves thoroughly with it, and always cleave to the truth as we

we learn it from Christ; not hesitating to depart from any human decisions, which we discern to be contrary to it. Fearless of all consequences, whilst we have the Bible in our hands, let it be the sole rule of our faith and practice. May God give us wisdom to discern the saving truths which it teaches, and firmness to maintain them!

5thly. The best preservative from Popery and from a Popish spirit among Protestants is a serious diligent perusal of the holy scriptures. Let parents, therefore, be solicitous to bring youthful minds into an early acquaintance with the word of God; let young persons accustom themselves to read it with attention and to attend the public ministrations of it. Acquaintance with the scriptures will increase their esteem of them; and, under a divine influence, be the means of establishing such principles and forming them into such a temper and practice, as will be an effectual antidote against the insinuations and corruptions of Popery. Those that are most in danger of being ensnared by the emissaries of the church of Rome, ever busy and active in making proselytes, are the ignorant, on the one hand, who are destitute of sound scriptural principles of religion,

religion, through want of a proper education; and the licentious and wicked, on the other, who have discarded all religious principles; who think it a matter of indifference what notions of religion they entertain, and who have no discernment of the things that differ. Those also, whose religion is more the result of passion and feeling than of mature reflection, and whose judgment is captivated by their senses and affections, are in no inconsiderable danger: Popery is much better adapted to the gross apprehensions of such persons than any other form of religion, which is more abstracted in its nature and more mental in its operation. It behoves us therefore, in our respective stations, to do all that lies in our power towards instructing the ignorant, giving them just views of the nature and importance of true religion, and guarding those that are most obnoxious, from that indifference and dissipation, which necessarily expose them both to error of principle and licentiousness of conduct. Associations and endeavours for this purpose are commendable and useful: They are adapted to the nature of religion and to the genius of Christianity: And the present state of our country seems to recommend and require exertions

exertions in this way, for the revival of scriptural religion; for inculcating the genuine principles of Protestants; and for guarding by a course of public instruction, set apart for this purpose, against the influence and spread of Popery*. But how far united attempts for reviving or continuing civil restraints and penalties in the province of religion and conscience, even where Popery is the object, may be expedient, is a question of a very complicated nature, and deserves

* “ We seem,” says an excellent writer, “ in matters of religion, to be arrived at a very interesting crisis, wherein the prophecy of our blessed Saviour, namely, that, *because of the abounding of iniquity, the love of many should wax cold*, is fulfilled among us, as visibly at least as it has been among Christians of any other period since the prophecy was delivered. There seems to be at this time not only a general coolness towards the Protestant religion, as distinguished from the spirit and practices of Popery, but likewise a general inattention to those interests of the temporal as well as of the spiritual kind, which it was the glory and praise of our ancestors to support.” See Blackburne’s Considerations on the present state of the controversy between the Protestants and Papists of Great Britain and Ireland, &c. 1768, p. 124. If this representation be just, the friends of religion and of their country have great reason to be alarmed, and to concur in promoting such a design as has been above suggested.

to be very maturely considered by those that are more immediately concerned †.

Finally.

† “ The grand objection,” says the writer last cited ; we may add, the only objection, “ to the toleration of “ Popery is merely of the *civil* kind ; that is to say, “ the tendency of its tenets to subvert the *civil* as “ well as the *religious* rights of mankind in general, “ and in particular the security we of this country have “ for our civil and religious liberties, under those laws “ upon which the Protestant settlement of our present “ government depends.” Confid. p. 38. But the following definition of toleration seems to imply, that it has other restrictions, beside the safety of the state, which are merely of a religious nature : “ Tolera- “ tion is the very opposite of persecution, and, there- “ fore, consists in the contrary spirit and conduct ; “ that is, in allowing every man to profess his own “ faith, *if not evidently repugnant to the holy scriptures*, “ without the least injury done him in his civil rights, “ so long as he shall give proper security for his being “ a peaceable member of society.” Appeal from the Protestant Association to the People of Great Britain ; &c. 1779. p. 6. According to this definition, a person may be able to give “ proper security for his being a “ peaceable member of society,” and yet be no fit object of toleration, if his faith be “ evidently repug- “ nant to the holy scriptures.” Is there any species or degree of intolerance, that may not be justified by this unguarded restriction ? The question of difficulty between us and the Papists, is not, whether their faith be

Finally. Let it be our solicitude to be as exemplary in our conduct as we are distinguished by the purity and excellence of our profession. Let not the word of God, to which we have free access, be an useless treasure: If we have better means of information than others, and know more than they of our duty and happiness, let us be more diligent in the practice of our duty and more zealous in the pursuit of our true happiness. The outward privileges of Christians and of Protestants can be of no avail without an answerable conduct: Let us discover the fruits of a substantial and progressive piety and goodness; that the testimony of scripture may accord with that of our own hearts in our favour: And these concurring testimonies, that of God in his word and that of our own consciences, will give us boldness in the approaching, awful, all-decisive day of judgment and retribution. Amen!

be conformable or repugnant to the scriptures, in our judgment of it, or in the judgment of the Protestant Magistrate who grants toleration; but, whether they are capable of giving "proper security for their being peaceable members of society."

F I N I S.

...to be...
...our...
...the purity and excellence of...
...not the word of God, to
...we have free access to an infinite
...we have better reasons of inno-
...than others, and know more than
...of our duty and happiness, let us be
...more diligent in the pursuit of our duty
...and more zealous in the pursuit of our true
...happiness. The outward privileges of Chris-
...and of Protestants can be of no avail
...without an inward condition: Let us
...discover the things that are spiritual and pro-
...give us grace and goodness; that the testi-
...mony of Scripture may accord with that
...of our own hearts in our favour: And that
...concurring testimonies, that of God in his
...word and that of our own consciences, will
...give us boldness in the approaching, awful,
...all-deciding day of judgment and retribution.

7 JUL 66

...in our
...of the presence of the Holy Spirit
...the witness of our own hearts
...the witness of the Holy Spirit
...the witness of the Holy Spirit

2 JUL 66

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